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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

"SPIRITUALITY VERSUS SPIRITISM" IS CHALLENGED

SIR:

I read the fine article by Winifred Kirkland on *Spirituality versus Spiritism* in your January issue with a decided thrill, reread it still thrilled but challenged, and again reread it to find it, for all its brave spirit, riddled with sophistry.

In the first place, it is clear that Miss Kirkland thus gaily discards spiritism because she, herself, has been satisfied. She is evidently acquainted with the spiritistic hypothesis and is not incredulous of its claims. She is the heir of those intrepid and loving people who sought the truth even in the abhorred haunts of professional mediumship and charlatanry, and pulled us out from under the heap of materialism in which our very souls smothered. Their discoveries were a necessary completion to the majestic pronouncements of natural science. Their work is not over. They need our support in their valiant effort to conquer "the last enemy." To be sure, Miss Kirkland grudgingly accords an obscure little corner to the regular investigators of psychic phenomena. That is not enough. When a dearly-loved person dies, we, who have been trained so rigidly in the laws of physical causation, who have been told that "thought and emotion are juices secreted by the brain as bile is secreted by the liver," need to hear the facts of the spirit fearlessly proclaimed by people near at hand, dealt with as a matter of common knowledge, not as something occult and rather disreputable. We need to know that our dead live, not because immortality *could* be or *should* be, but because it *is*,—that they live, indeed, and have given proof thereof.

To be sure, Miss Kirkland leaves another avenue. She has evidently, as have many others, a little psychic power, enough to make her convincingly aware, at times, of the nearness of her dead. So many people have not that power; and so many who have it, mistrust it. When we are told that the last tender, radiant smile of our beloved is nothing but "the sublime delirium that precedes death," how shall we believe, in our intervals of dull depression, that these moments of keen "knowing" are aught but delusion?

Again, Miss Kirkland says that one may bravely accept the alternative of extinction. For ourselves, perhaps, and for the old, it is possible to face silence and an absolute ending. But can we thus lightly renounce for young and ardent beings who were crowded out of life with all their living yet to do? I think we cannot taste any common joy of air or sunshine, if we feel that they have lost all even in unregretful oblivion.

Miss Kirkland further contends "that the dead desire of us a serenity so

poised that they need not stop to worry about us." True; and it is to fine passages like that that her article owes much of its appeal. How maintain that serenity if we fear, as many do, that our very dear are cheated and robbed?

She says that they come to us, when summoned "under the stress of patient pity." Facts do not bear that contention out, but that, on the contrary, they seek every avenue of approach, even in the teeth of our reluctant unbelief, and are glad beyond words when they succeed in reaching us.

She claims that our preoccupation with the affairs of another world leads to a neglect of our duties in this. In the first place, nothing is more selfish than the absorption of a hopeless grief. Anything that lightens that tends to restore people to their normal activities. In the second place, our dead are the first to reproach us for moping and to urge us on in the fight. Again, those very few who believe themselves to be in constant communication with their dead spend with them far less time, a few minutes of earned leisure only, than would be spent with the living persons. That they are not neglectful of the claims of humanity upon them is proved by the examples of Sir Oliver Lodge and of Mrs. Sewall, a list of whose beneficent activities is given by Booth Tarkington in the introduction to her book, *Neither Dead Nor Sleeping*. Perhaps a greater proof still is the world-shaking labors of a little band of despairing men who saw their crucified master many times in the few months that followed his death and who summoned him frequently when "two or three were gathered together in his name."

Of course, there are always the people who seek material gain from palmists, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of all kinds. But I cannot see that even this situation would not be helped by a more ardent and open championship of spiritism; for if the Society for Psychical Research could have funds for a foundation, it could protect the better type of medium from commercial use and trickery, and aid in discountenancing the others. Nor can I believe that our spirit friends could or would give sufficiently good tips on the stock market to make that a serious menace.

Last but not least, Miss Kirkland seems to hold that faith is not faith that needs proof. In other words, "Faith is," as the small boy defined it, "believing in things that ain't so." But is it not of the essence of faith that one believes, proves, demonstrates to the unbelieving, and then proceeds to another faith, eternally crossing the chasm on an hypothesis, but building that hypothesis into a bridge over which less daring feet may follow? Miss Kirkland says that "death has been the only adventure that could not be stolen from any human creature." That, of course, is a bit sentimental. When that adventure comes, it is entered into, usually, very quietly, very beautifully, in spite of the throes of physical dissolution. An adjustment is made for the departing spirit. Dread in the last moments, seems impossible. Of that adventure we could hardly rob the passing soul by any beliefs or unbeliefs of ours. But why we should not rob death of the black, ignorant terror that

surrounds it often in the minds of the living, I do not know, unless we wish to keep that terror for disciplinary purposes, as did the mediaeval church. It would be an adventure, indeed, if with all the conscious faculties with which we are endowed, in coöperation with those who reach back to us with such passionate kindness from the other side, we could conquer death, at least to the extent of developing that fine psychic sense that would enable us to feel, as a real thing, the interpenetration of worlds, to draw inspiration from the higher, and to build our purposes to it. The universe is not made yet. Into our hands, if evolution means anything, is confided part of its making. It may seem an absurdity in ages hence that death was ever the complete shut-off that it often now is. "What we shall be it doth not yet appear."

All in all, it seems to me that Miss Kirkland says very beautifully, very nobly, that she, personally, is so constituted that she has been able to accept the proof of survival, that she has an intimate perception of her own dead, and that she feels this to be enough for the living of a brave life. In this she can speak for many but not for all. The wider, more commonplace acceptance of the conclusions of spiritism would mean that the great majority would lack the desire or patience for any kind of investigation. But to the few who have given us back the soul, of which the scientific assertions of the last century did seem to have robbed us, and who would follow that soul into its next abode to bring us back a sure word of its worth and continuity, let us give an open, ungrudging, unashamed support. Columbus was not the only one with new worlds to win.

LORNA R. F. BIRTWELL.

Ridgewood, N. J.

MR. PINCHOT HAS A CRITIC

DEAR SIR:

Mr. Pinchot in his article "The Economic Significance of Forestry" in *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW* for February, presents a situation of much importance. His course of reasoning and his conclusions do not appear to me to be entirely correct, however.

Forestry is a subject in which it is obviously very difficult to separate sentiment from clear logic. In discussing the practical production of timber for strict commercial utilization, it seems to me that the effect of known natural economic laws must be given the closest attention. Just at this time, for example, the more or less uncertain returns from timber production are less attractive to the ordinary investor, than are the returns from most industrial investments, and it is difficult to escape from the conclusion that industry needs money for manufacturing and transportation more than it does for crops of trees to mature fifty or more years hence. We have no grounds for believing that current investment opportunities do not indicate where money would do the most good in commercial life, and we have no assurance that the programme of intensive forestry under Federal supervision, which Mr. Pinchot